



# Hit by a Tractor Trailer

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The truck driver finally noticed what was happening and started to slow down. This enabled me to grasp the steering wheel. I turned it directly into the barriers to stop my vehicle. The barriers finally did what they are designed to do. They kept my Explorer riding the wall so it didn't veer off into other traffic. In the process, my tires blew, my rims shredded, and my fenders shed their metal. Sparks were flying everywhere like the 4th of July. After what seemed like an eternity, I finally came to a stop. Headlights were still coming up very fast behind me, so I bailed out of my Explorer as fast as I could to avoid being struck from behind.

It was a beautiful October Friday at Dyess Air Force Base, Texas. I was planning to go see my parents in Alabama and pick up my son who was visiting them. I was not looking forward to the 12-hour drive because it's a pretty boring one, but I had traveled it many times before. I got off work a little early to pack and get some rest. It was around 4:00 p.m. when I finally got all my bags in the back of my Ford Explorer. Instead of resting though, I decided to go out and see some friends.

Even though I didn't get back home until around 10:00 p.m., I reasoned that if I went ahead and left, I'd miss all the traffic in Ft. Worth and Dallas. I got on the road about 11:00 p.m. that night and made good time through the twin cities. When I reached Garland, Texas, I discovered that I-20 was under construction. The section that was normally 4 lanes was now 2 lanes. I was driving at about 85 miles per hour on the inside lane when along came an 18-wheeler truck — yes, I was driving above the posted limit, but was about to learn a lesson about that the hard way. The 18-

wheeler was slowly starting to pass on my right when the road began to curve left. During the turn, I noticed that the trucker's trailer started to come into my lane, so I moved closer to the barrier walls on my left. I got so close that I thought for sure my side mirror was going to hit the wall. My breathing got faster as I looked at his trailer, then the wall, and back at the trailer again. Then it happened.

I felt a thud, heard my back window explode into pieces, and watched as I collided with the barrier wall. From that point on, my Explorer became like the ball in a pinball machine that goes back and forth between the two bumper pads really fast — except there was no padding! I bounced from the concrete wall to the truck's trailer and back again — over and over and over. My steering wheel jerked from my grip; I was unable to grasp it again. I slammed on my brakes, but it was useless. Every time I hit the trailer, it dragged me along with it. Pieces of my Explorer were going everywhere and hitting cars behind us. One piece even went through the front windshield of another car.

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When the Garland police measured the distance from where I first slammed on my brakes to the final stopping point of my vehicle, it was an astonishing 150 yards! This did not include the initial impact point. My Explorer ended up with a bent frame, two shredded tires and rims, melted brakes, and lots of broken glass and missing parts. I impacted some of the barrier walls with such great force that they broke into pieces and had to be replaced. The 18-wheeler fared better, but still had numerous dents and punctures along its trailer's side.

If I had been driving the speed limit, I would have had more time to react to the predicament I found myself in that night. It is still amazing to me that I walked away with minor bruises and a strained neck and back. That was only possible because I was wearing my seat belt. Don't wait until you are in a similar situation to decide whether or not seat belts work. They definitely do. Increase your odds of walking away: drive the speed limit and buckle up! ►